



FAQ: Development in the San Juan Hills

There are vacant lots in the City of Belmont that are located in the San Juan Hills area. Many of these lots are zoned HRO2 (Subdivided Hillside Residential Open Space). Single-family development is permitted, however, it is limited in the amount of square footage allowed which addresses the Open Space element to this district. This is a summary of some of the more frequently asked questions regarding development of these vacant lots.

NOTE: THIS SUMMARY IS NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE BELMONT MUNICIPAL CODE OR ZONING ORDINANCE, AND SHOULD NOT BE RELIED ON FOR PROPERTY PURCHASE OR PROJECT DESIGN DECISIONS. FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT THE BELMONT PERMIT CENTER AT 595-7416

1. Can I apply for a Building Permit to build a new home on a vacant lot in the San Juan Hills?

Only after receiving Road Access and Planning Approvals can a building permit be issued. The first step is to provide paved vehicle access. In cases where there is no paved access, a Road Improvement Plan would be required of the developer. Without road access the Planning Department and the Building Department will not consider any proposals. Road Improvement Plans are reviewed by the City Council and the Council has the authority to approve or deny these applications. The Public Works Department facilitates applications for Road Improvement.

2. Why does Belmont require Road Improvement Plans?

Unplanned extensions of unimproved roads in San Juan Hills have created problems with emergency access, drainage, road financing and maintenance, and equity for property owners beyond the extension. Belmont requires a Road Improvement Plan so that such problems can be resolved before a road is extended.

3. Can I obtain an Easement from another property to gain access?

Obtaining an easement is a matter between private property owners and involves the preparation of a legal document which is recorded with San Mateo County. This type of proposal would be a private driveway through another property. If an easement is provided for access, it will need to meet all applicable City and South County Fire Department requirements.

4. What is HRO-2 Zoning?

HRO stands for Hillside Residential Open Space. The permitted Floor Area in this Zoning District is much more conservative than in standard single-family (R-1) Zones. The objectives of the HRO-2 regulations are to minimize grading and to reduce citizens' exposure to hazardous slopes by decreasing residential density as slope increases, to encourage clustering of homes and density transfer to reduce roadway and driveway grading, to regulate home size, and to encourage the voluntary merger of lots. All lots have a minimum Floor Area allowance of 900 sq. ft. New homes require 400 square feet for a garage to meet the minimum parking requirements.

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5. What is a Floor Area Transfer?

In order to allow development yet preserve open space, a Floor Area Transfer is a way to satisfy both of these goals. If two lots are owned along the same roadway and in the same Statistical Sub Area (San Juan Hills Area Plan) this procedure may be a possibility and a way to add floor area potential. The sending lot will become dedicated open space while the receiving lot gains the development potential.

6. What are the ‘chances’ of gaining approval to build and how long would it take?

Recently the City of Belmont has been moving to preserve the remaining open space in the San Juan Hills for the reasons identified above. Code Amendments and the undertaking of a Lot Merger in 2001 are among some recent actions taken to protect future residents from hazardous development in this area.

Each proposed development project is unique and the timeline can vary with each project. As a general rule more complex projects take longer, and these types of projects usually have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Complex site and design issues
- Slope greater than 30%
- Unstable soils
- No improved road access
- Grading over 500 cubic yards
- Opposition from neighbors or citizen groups
- Protected trees onsite

These are just a few of the more frequently asked questions regarding the San Juan Hills and vacant lots in that area. If you have additional questions please call the **Permit Center** at (650) 598-4204.

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